ISSN 0712-7774

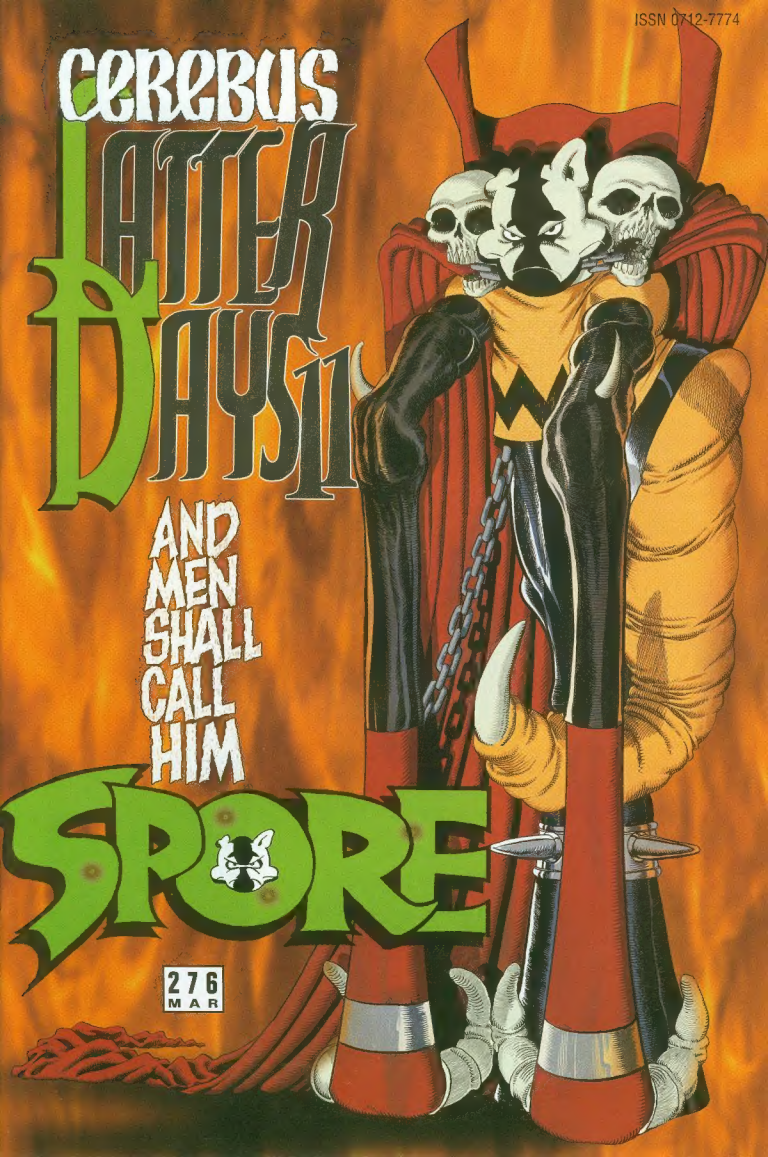
CEREBUS

LATTER DAYS 11

AND MEN SHALL CALL HIM

SPORE

276
MAR



press release

The Comics Journal

By request from *The Comics Journal* for their "2002 Comics Preview". Compare and contrast the following with what they end up printing. Fun for the whole family!

2002 AT AARDVARK-VANAHEIM

First, I am still waiting to be arrested and charged under Canada's Hate Literature Laws (now more Draconian than ever, having—unlike our sad excuse for a military—been beefed up in the aftermath of 11 September) for "promulgating hate literature against an identifiable societal group". In this case, feminists. "Identifiable" might be what's holding them back since "robbing men blind and giving all their assets to women and children by all available judicial and legislative means" has really become "The Canadian Way"; thus making "Canadian" and "feminist" interchangeable terms (note the emotion-based term: "hate" literature).

Is 2002 the year that *Cerebus* finally goes off-schedule after shipping on-time monthly since mid-1987? Ger and I are both slowing down dramatically, having to put in longer and longer hours just to maintain the schedule and (hopefully) the quality of the work. Has the breaking point been reached? A formal announcement in the comics press would precede a skipped solicitation in *Diamond Previews*, at which time each issue would be solicited only as completed. With *Previews'* four-month "lead time" that would automatically make *Cerebus* a thrice-yearly instead of monthly publication.

Still waiting for a Columbus, Ohio date and time for three three-minute rounds with *Bone* Boy.

As to the contents of *Cerebus* 274-285: rated on the *Doran-Thompson Ballistic Feminist Scale* (named, of course, for Colleen and Jill—love you lots, "ladies"):

274 - Massacre of the Cirinists - 7 "DTBF"s "Is Dave Brady *Actually* Gay?" review, part II - 8 "DTBF"s

275 - Cirinist Corpse Decapitation scene - 7 "DTBF"s reply to social worker letter in *Aardvark Comment*: 6 "DTBF"s

276 - Spore's Spores & Community Center scene - 8 "DTBF"s "Islam, My Islam" essay part one - 8 "DTBF"s

277 - "Islam, My Islam" essay part two - 8 "DTBF"s

278 - "Islam, My Islam" essay part three - 8 "DTBF"s

279 - "Why Canada Slept" essay - 5 American "DTBF"s
10 Canadian "DTBF"s

280 - 285 Konigsberg, the Not-So-Good Samaritan.
? "DTBF"s (the poor dears might be too tired to go ballistic by that point)

If sales remain steady on the Cerebus trade paperbacks (God willing) the reprint schedule would be:

Going Home - 4th printing
Women - 5th printing
High Society - 8th printing
Cerebus - 10th printing

Issue 285, December will (God willing) be the 25th Anniversary issue. We intend to celebrate this milestone by saying, "Yay." and then getting back to work.

CEREBUS
NO. 276 MARCH 2002

DAVE SIM
Creator, Writer
Characters/
pencil & ink,
mechanical tones,
lettering

GERHARD
Background
Artist/pencil & ink

CHRIS VERHOEVEN
Cover Technician

LATTER DAYS

•

PROLOGUE
(Cerebus 266
and 267)

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 268 to
288)

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 289 to
300)

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KITCHENER, ON N2G 4R2
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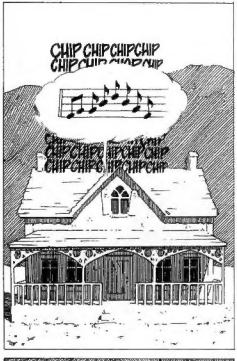
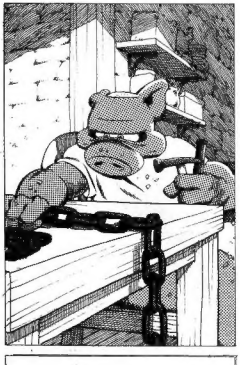
WINDSOR, ONTARIO

BLIP
BLIP
BLIP
BOUNCE
BOUNCE
BOUNCE
TINK tonk TINK tonk
CRINK CRINK CRINK
THA-BANG
THA-BANG
THA-BANG
THA-BANG

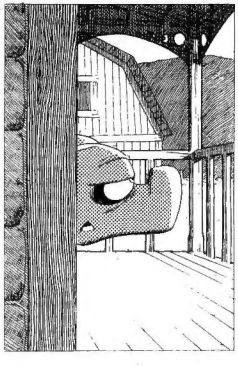


5: The next daie the Three Wise Fellowes with "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold camest unto Cerebvs bearing tidings of McSpahn's victorie at Estrogenia



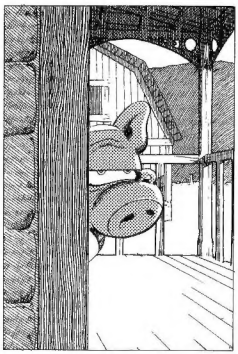
6: (which aforetimes wast named East Serrea)

7: and inqviring of Cerebvs saying, From whence camest the lowde noise of screaming and of chaines which we hast heard from within thy chambers?

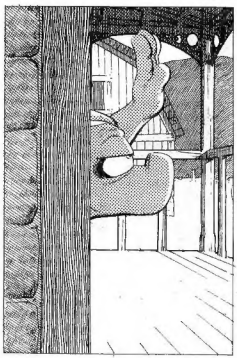


8: And Cerebvs spake vnto them saying, Cerebvs hast called foorth the King of All Demons, who shalbe to McSpahn like vnto five diuisions of fierce and valiant coloured pins (ifsobe that McSpahn shouldst falter in his quest to bringe an ende to this Age which hast ouerturned all righteousness after the maner of the deuill, the uiper and the scorpion).

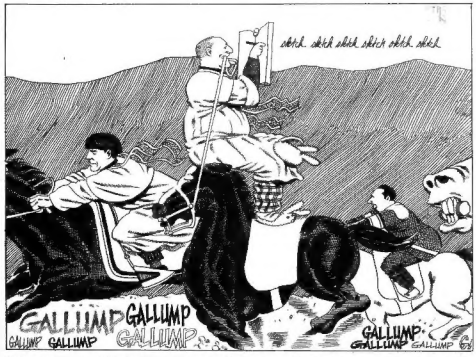
9: Then spake "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold unto Cerebus saying, McSpahn? Falter? (and he didst make a snorting noise like vnto one of the Three Wise Horses).

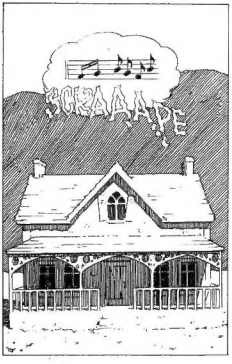


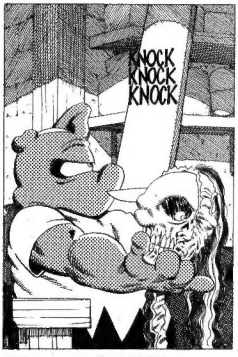
10: Still, ye can neuer tell, sayeth Cerebvs. And giuing thankes Vnto The Three Wise Fellowes and "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold for their glad tidings



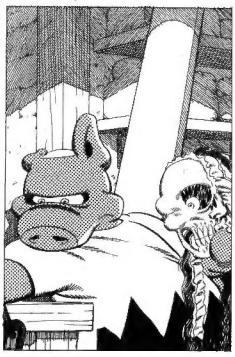
11: He bade them hasten backe to the side of MrSpahn.



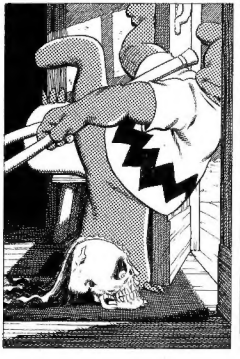




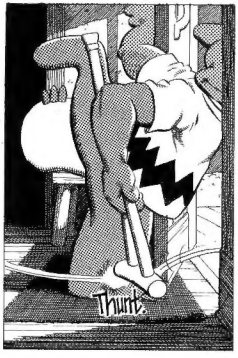
12: And the second daie the Three Wise Fellowes & "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold camest vnto Cerebvs bearing tidings of McSpahn's victorie at Menstrua



13: (which aforetimes wast called Upper Dehrsion)

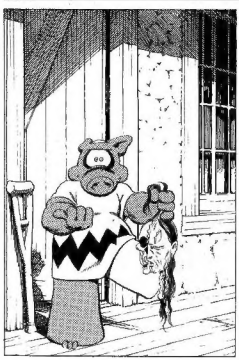


14: And after that Cerebvs hadst opened vnto them the doore to his chambers and as they spake vnto Cerebvs



15: Lo, a severed heade much torne and with stripes of its flesh hanging didst land at the feet of the Three Wise Fellowes & of "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold.

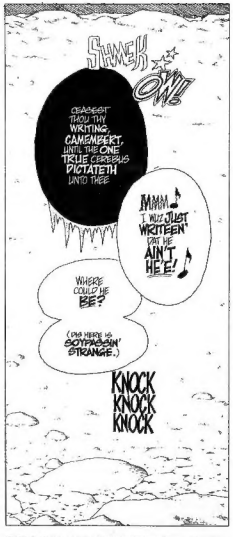
16: And Cerebvs didst picke up the severed head by its haire and spake his apologies vnto the Three Wise Fellowes & "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes" Jerrold saying, Forgivest thou Cerebvs. As thou seest the King of All Demons is a a most carelesse houseguest and a sloppie eater. Tary ye here a moment whilst Cerebvs doth returne unto the King of All Demons' supper dishe his "Cirinist Crunchie".

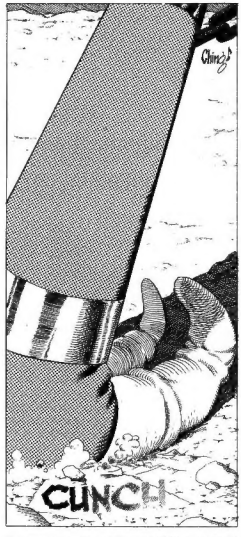


17: Howsoeuer the Three Wise Fellowes & "Ye Barge of Ye Bosomes' Ferrold of a sudden remembering a prior engagement didst swiftly gallop away as fast as the Three Wise Horses (and the one Unwise Horse) couldst carry them backe to the side of MrSpahn. Woop woop woop woop.

SCRAPE
SCRAPE
SCRAPE
Crink
Crink

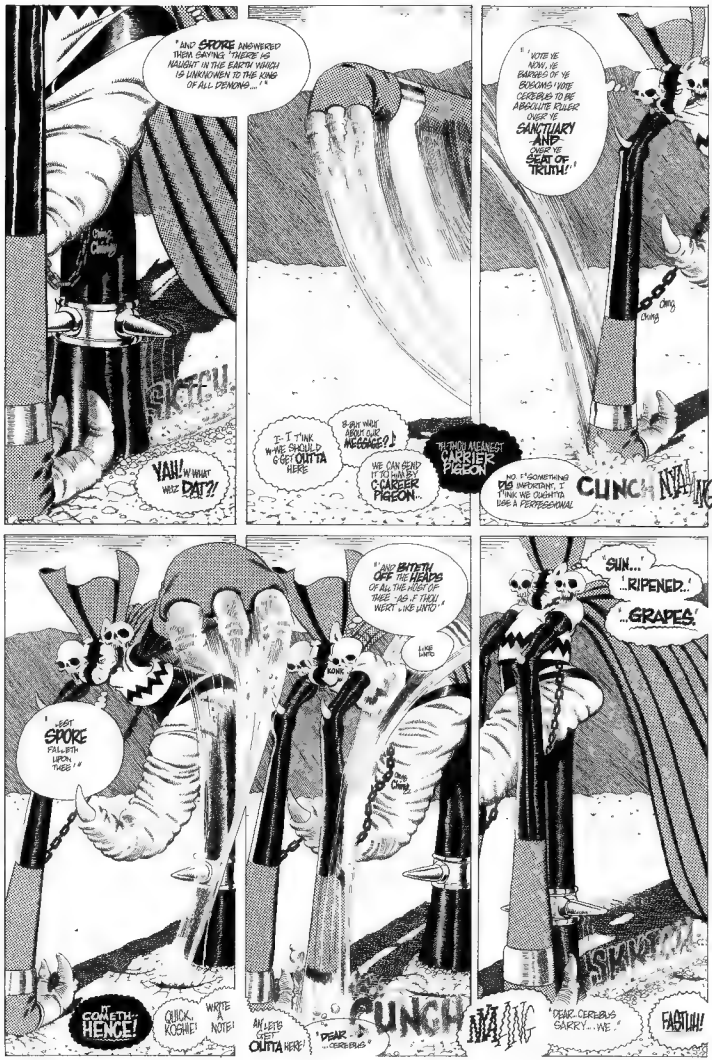
18: And the thirde daie McSpahn, the Three Wise Fellowes and all the hoste of "Ye Barges of Ye Bosomes" camest unto Cerebvs & lo, Cerebvs wast nowhere to bee found.


SHWEK
OW!
CEASEDEST THOU TOY WRITING, CAMEMBERT, UNTIL THE ONE TRUE CEREBVS PICTATETH UNTO THEE
MMM♪ I WUZ JUST WRITTEEN' FAR HE AIN'T HE'E! ♪
WHERE COULD HE BE?
(AH HERE IS SOMETHIN' STRANGE.)
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK



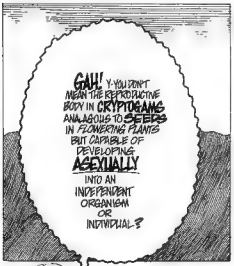
"AND SPORE SPAKE UNTO ALL THE HOST OF THEM SAYING, 'THOU BRINGEST TIDINGS OF MCSPAHN'S VICTORY OVER ALL THE CIRNISES.'"
Chinz Chinz♪
CUNCH
NYUNG!

"AND ALL THE HOST OF THEM WERE ASTONIED AT SPORE'S WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDINGS AND SPAKE UNTO SPORE SAYING, 'HOW DIDDEST THOU KNOW THIS?'"
(THERE GOETH IT AGAIN.)


"AND SPORE ANSWERED THEM, SAYING, "THERE IS NAUGHT IN THE EARTH WHICH IS UNKNOWEN TO THE KING OF ALL DEMONS...!"
CHING CHING
SKRRT-U
YAH! W'WHAT WUZ DAT?!
I-I THINK W'WE SHOULD G'GET OUTTA HERE!
B-BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR HECORGE?!
WE CAN SEND IT TO HIM VIA C'CARRIER PIGEON..
TH'THOSE MEANEST CARRIER PIGEON
NO..! "SOMETHING BIG IMPENDING.." I THINK WE OUGHTTA BE A PERTEGIONAL
"I NOTE YE NOW, YE BARDIES OF YE BOSOMS I NOTE CERBERUS TO BE ABSOLUTE RULER OVER YE SANCTUARY AND OVER YE SEAT OF TRUTH!"
CHING CHING
CLINCH NYAH ING
"AND SPORE FALLETH UPON THEE!"
"AND BITETH OFF THE HEADS OF ALL THE HOST OF THEE! "AS I TROW I WERT.." LIKE DATO!
KONG
CHING CHING
"AT COMETH HENCE!
QUICK, KOSHIE! WRITE A NOTE!
AN LETS GET OUTTA HERE!
"DEAR ...CERBERUS"
CUNCH
NYAH ING
SUN...
..RIPENED..
..GRAPES.
SKRRT-U-U-U
"DEAR..CERBERUS SARRY...WE.."
FASTUH!

19: And there didst appeare vnto the hoste of them a terible monster

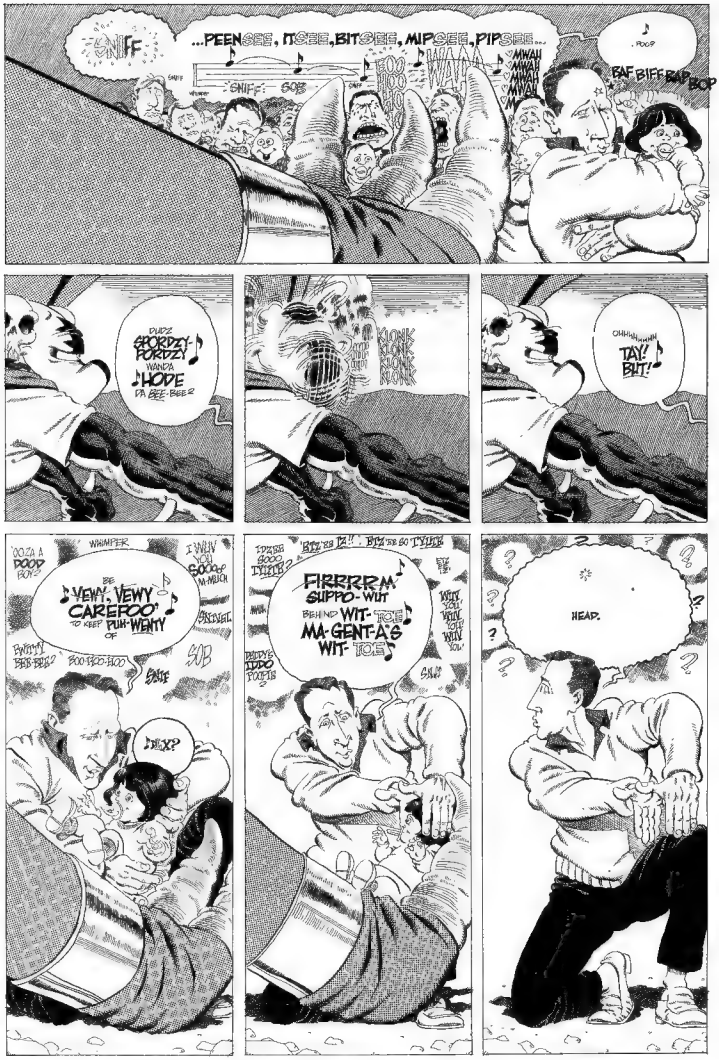
speaking unto
them and
saying,
I am Spore,


GAH! Y-YOU DON'T MEAN THE REPRODUCTIVE BODY IN CRYPTOGAMS ANALAGOUS TO SEEDS IN FLOWERING PLANTS BUT CAPABLE OF DEVELOPING ASEXUALLY INTO AN INDEPENDENT ORGANISM OR INDIVIDUAL?

ye King
of all
Demons.

SO YOUSE ARE DA KING OF ALL DEMONS I BIN HEARIN' SO MUCH ABOUT
I'M TODD "LARLANE" M'SPAHN!
PLEASED TA MEET YER ACQUAINTANCE AND LIKEWISE I'M SURE!
I WUNNO IF'N DA BOYCE HERE HAVE HAD AN OPERA-TROONITY TO FILL YOUSE IN ON OUAH CURRENT SIT-YOO-EYE-ZATION:
WE HAVE VOTED YOO-NAMMIN-USLY TO MAKE CERBILLS DA ABSOLUTE RULER OVER DA SANK-TO-WARY AND DA SEAT O' TROOT'!
PLiB
MOSTLY ON ACCOUNTA HIS NAG-MAMMON-OUS OFFER TO HAVE YOUSE TOTAL-LA OUAH FIGHTEEN' FOR US (DATS RIGHT, "FLIB"?)
WHICH..!
(WHEN WE VILT ON DA CRUSP O' ABSOLUTE AN TOTAL VICTORY OVER DA CIRCUMSTANCES) CON'Y YESTERDAY)
...VILT DA FOY-DIST TING FROM OUAH MAGIC-YOO-LIN MOINDS BUT
...IN DA SECOND WHICH.

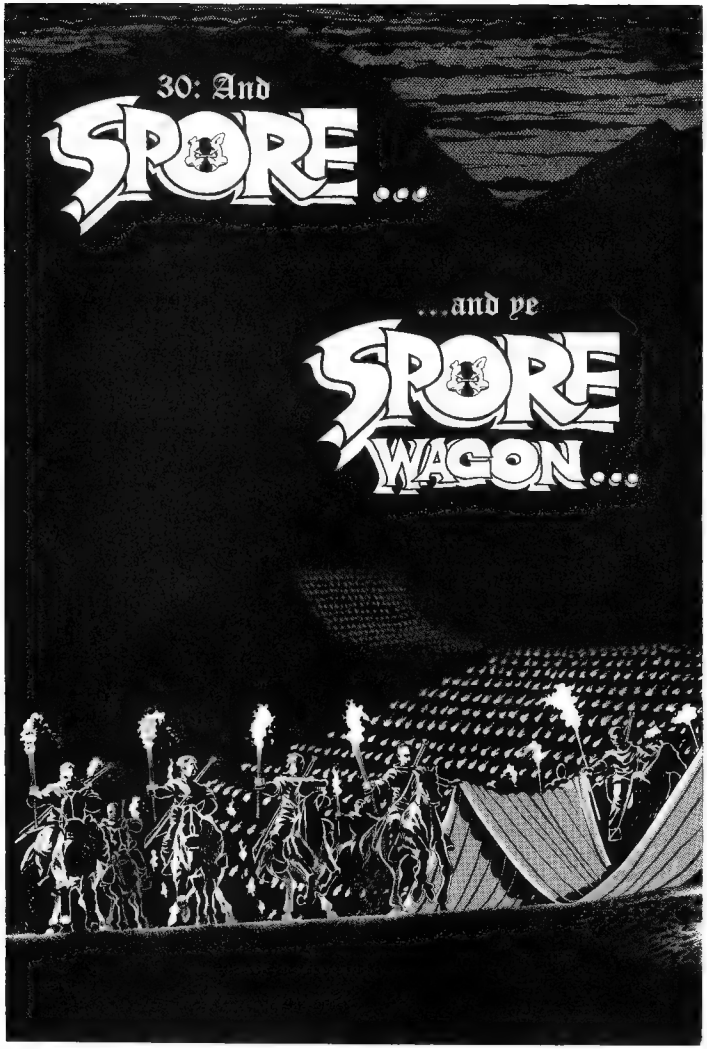
(WHEN DA CHRISTMISTER) (ALL OF A SUDDENLY-LIKE) (COOK OFF DERE LOBBITS (OR WHUTEVER YOUSE CALL DEM CRAZY WOODS DEY WEAR) (AN BLENDED IN WIT DA INDIRGENOUS POISON-ELLES)
(THUS MAKEEN POSITIVE EYE-PENTI-FRICATION SUMMERLY PROBLEMO MADRIGAL)
(PER DOSE OF HIS INCLIMBED TO SMOOTHEN FONST AN EMPEN DA INQUISITION FOM LATER)
...WE COULD SUDDENLY SEE AS HAVEEN A SOMTA IN -- NOT- DERE- TWO- FOUR READILY PERGREEVED-- VALEDICTORY
PARTICULARLY SEE IN AS HOW (MUCH TO MANY OF OUR SOOPRISES) MANY OF US HAD AWCKE DIS-MORNEEN' WIT MANY OF OUR THROATS CUT.
(PRESENT COMPANY EXTRUDED)
TO WRIT:
(AS I SAID DIS 'MORNEEN' TO MY LONG-TIME ASSOCIATE, "FERRY TIE" JERKOLD:)
YO.
"DIS... LOOKIES LOIK UNTO A JOE FOR..."
...DA KING OF AWL DEMONS!"
TWITCH
FLIPS
GULP
OUR TRUST IN YOUSE CHOICES YOU UP O SPORE: I CAN TELL!
DO NOT BE ASHAMED OF YOOAH TEARS O WELL-SPRAWN FOR WE BARGES OF YE BROOZLUMS" HAVE WEPPET ALTSO WHEN ANY OF OUAH WIFES BRINGEE UNTO UTZ...!
OUAH~ LITTOE ? ONES~
OUAH BEE-YOO TEE-FULL BABY-BEE BOYCE~ AN OUAH BEE TEE-FULL BEA BAY BEE GIRLS SNIFF GOY-ULS
SNIFFLE LIKE MY O OWN BEE FEFULL LIT TOE MA-GENT-A SNIFFFF
SHIZ
IN MY OWN BEE-YO OT-EEE-FULL, LIT-TOE, WIT-TOE, IT-TOE, BIT-TOE, EEN SEE, WEEN SEE, BEEN SEE

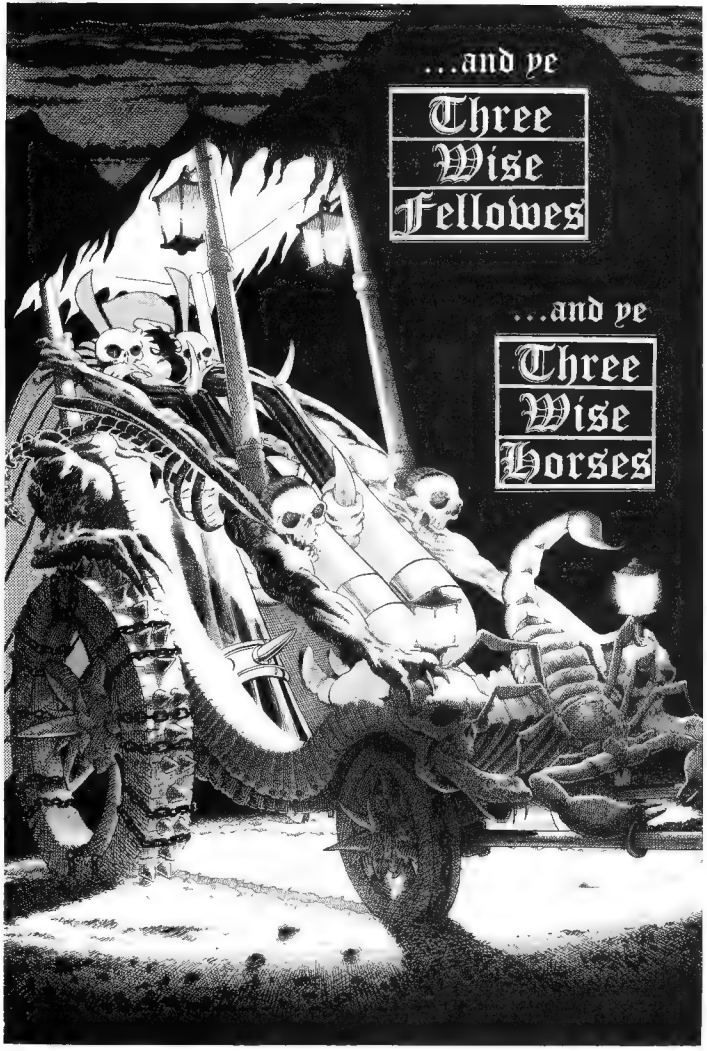

SNIFF
...PEENSEE, ITSEE, BITSEE, MIPSEE, PIPSEE...
SNIFF SOB
WAAA
MWAH
. POOP
FAF BIFF BAP BOP
DUDE GROOPZY POOPZY! WANDA HODE DA BEE-BEE?
KLONK
OHHH... TAY! BIT!
WHIMPER
BE VEWY, VEWY CAREFOO' TO KEEP PUH-WENTY OF
I WUV YOU SOOOO MUCH
SNIFF
SOB
?DEX?
FIRRRRM SUPPO-WIT BEHIND WIT-TOE MA-GENT-A'S WIT-TOES
HEAD.

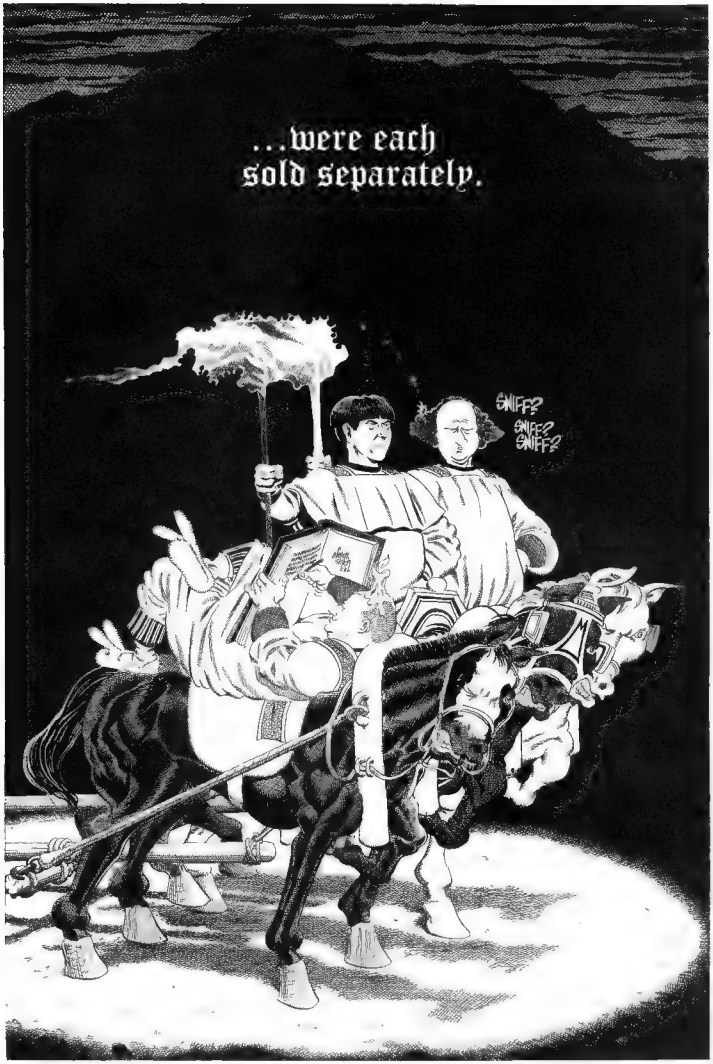
Whee!
MAGENTA!
AIM. FOAH DA BIG PILE... OF LADIES!
PEY. CUSHION. YOOAH FALL.
PLEASE HEAR DADDY, MAGENTA!
AIM FOR DA BIG PILE
OF DEAD LADIES!
BIZEL. HA-HA-HA-
Chim?
PEY. CUSHION. YOOAH FALL.
GET. RIP.
OF THE BABES.

NO NO NO NO NO
GIVE.
THE BABIES.
BACK.
TO THEIR MOTHERS.
GET.
YOUR GUNS.
AND BE. BACK HERE.
BEFORE.
NIGHTFALL.
Whizzzz
ZIP
ZIP
ZING
ZIP!
Whip ZIP!
ZOOM!
ZIP
ZIP
ZOOM
WHIP
ZIP
ZING

20: And it came to passe
that when the hoste
of them had voted Cerebvs
absolute ruler ouer ye Sanctvarie
and ye Seate of Truth, Spore
called to him ye Wise Fellowes,
Mosher and Losher, and spake
unto them,
21: Describing vnto them ye
means of conueyance which they
were to construct for ye King
of All Demons and which wouldst
bear him vnto ye place of
battle where McSpahn had
faltered and where seueral of
"Ye Barges of Ye Bosomes"
had suffred vnto death.
22: And when ye means of
conbeyance (which wast called
ye Spore Wagon) wast finished
23: Then didst the hoste of them
return unto Spore and didst
hearken vnto Spore when Spore
spake vnto them, saying:
24: Today thou art "Ferrie
Tits" no more; neither art thou
"Barges of Ye Bosomes".
Today and henceforth, by thy
name "Spore's Spores" onely shalt
thou bee knowen.
25: And this saying wast well
pleasing vnto the hoste of them
and there wast much shouting
and rejoicing.
26: Until Spore didst smacketh two
of their heads together with a
noise surpassing lowde (which
didst cause their attention to bee
drawn vnto Spore and their
shouting and rejoicing to
cease). And Spore spake vnto
them saying:
27: Now doth Spore and "Spore's
Spores" goe foorth
together that we might prevail
in bringing an ende to
this age which hath overturned al
righteousnesse after ye manner of the
deuill, the viper and the scorpion.
28: And seeing that the hoste of
them were silent, Spore spake
vnto them, saying: Shout and
rejoice. But overdoeth it not.
29: And they hearkened vnto
Spore, shouting and rejoicing
quietly.


30: And
SPORE...
...and ye
SPORE WAGON...


...and ye
Three Wise Fellowes
...and ye
Three Wise Horses


...were each
sold separately.
SNIFF?
SNIFF?
SNIFF?

essay

Islam, My Islam

It seemed the most the most natural thing in the world for me to attend a *Christian* Church after a year of studying the Bible and the Koran (and watching various television ministries which ranged, in my view, from enriching to appalling) given that my family had been Christian (present company—almost entirely—excepted) a mere generation—or two—ago. I wasn't a Jew; although a case could be made that my maternal great-grandfather may have been Jewish or half-Jewish. The subject only vaguely interests my grandmother in the way that all subjects concerned with families—their own and others'—always at least vaguely interest women (my grandmother is a Christian fallen away, in long-ago sequence, from a variety of Christian churches and a woman—like most women—now content with a quiet reverence for…capitalized…Nature as the bedrock of what humanist faith she retains). My great-grandfather had been a paper-hanger and a painter, conducting his livelihood from a pushcart in the streets of Edinburgh: a vocation and a means of conducting that vocation which was not unheard of among the Jews of that metropolis at the turn of the last century. The possibility of her father having been wholly or partly Jewish certainly doesn't appear to shape or colour my grandmother's remembrance of him one way or the other.

I gave the Anglican Church a try. Pretty close to perfect attendance every Sunday for about six months. One of the priests (there were three) was a woman. It seemed, on my part, a very Christian act to endure what I considered to be a near-blasphemous (all right, a *completely* blasphemous) reality: a woman ordained as a Minister of God delivering a sermon. My cross to bear (nyuck nyuck nyuck). One among many as it turned out. For every exhilarating surprise among the hymns ("Holy, Holy, Holy"—where on *earth* did I remember *that one* from?) there would be a half dozen that made me wish I'd brought my own crucifix or vial of holy water (Get back! All of you! I'm not afraid to use these!). The break point for me came, ultimately, over communion. I tried to stay as open-minded as I could as everyone else filed up to the front to indulge in a little metaphorical cannibalism, reminded myself and reminded myself of the undoubted validity of the ritual, prayed my own prayer and tried (in vain) to ignore the fact that communion occurred only in the somewhat (to me, anyway) ambiguous Synoptic Gospels (the Jesus of *John's* Gospel washes the feet of his disciples: no transubstantiation ritual). But mostly I just sat there being very, very, very resentful on behalf of the Jews. The Jews with their strict/stricter/so strict you could *plotz* dietary laws (No. Blood. "For the blood is the life thereof.") And yet…and *yet!*…for centuries upon centuries the Christians had accused the Sons of Jacob of holding secret rituals where they devoured the flesh and blood of Christian babies. And there the…goyim…were: up at the front—waiting their turn to nosh on Baby Jesus Bits.

Oy gevalt.

That was *the* break point. There were smaller straws that didn't in themselves *break* the camel's back but which sure put a kink in his hump. The sparseness of the scriptural readings, for one. One from the Torah (excuse me, the *Old* Testament) and one from the New Testament. One chapter or one Psalm, usually (*Psalms*? What are they reading from the *Psalms* for? Oh, right. Jesus' Great-Great-Great-to-the-ninth-power grandfather: "Iesus, thou sonne of Dauid."). Chapter three from Prophet A this week. Chapter nine from Prophet X—who had lived five hundred years prior or subsequent to Prophet A—the next week. How do you say "whiplash" in Hebrew? I'd go home and read Isaiah. Takes about six or seven hours. Scripture, to me, is a meal, not a snack. Put away the Baby Jesus Bits and read something *all the way through*, f'cryin' out loud.

I'm making mock here, I freely admit it and I freely confess that that is a very bad thing for me to be doing. It sure isn't because I lack respect for Jesus or his revelation to the world. Exactly the opposite. Whatever fault I find with the various Christian churches and denominations, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Creflow Dollar (you think I'm making that name up. Check him out on your local faith channel sometime)—and it seems more difficult each day to find *any* modern-day incarnation of Christianity that I *don't* find completely abhorrent—still, Bottom Line:

Jesus got nailed to two really, really big pieces of wood with three really, really big spikes. And there wasn't a moment in the last years of his life that he had any illusions but that that was *exactly* what he was headed for on his way to somewhere nicer. Even allowing for the fact that there would have been voices in his head assuring him everything was going to be okay, the "fix is in" (or whatever it was that They) (back in the Age of Prophets

which I believe ended with death of Muhammad in 632) (told someone who had been selected to be one of God's Messengers)…voices that (*allowed* him? *encouraged* him? *compelled* him?) to keep moving, one foot in front of the other, on the straight and narrow path…even allowing for the *Existence Of* and the *Reassurance Provided By* those voices…there was (evidently) also no shortage of voices and *faces* that would come leering out of the jostling awe-stricken crowds, "Iesus, thou sonne of Iesse…aren't thou come *before thy time?*" Attempting to sow doubt and fear about the central reality of his own task, the central reality of his own nature, the central reality by which he must needs keep moving, one foot in front of the other, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year, on the straight and narrow path to those two really, really big pieces of wood and those three really, really big spikes.

Courage? There isn't a word large enough to describe that kind of courage. Faith? There isn't a word large enough to describe that kind of faith. Which is why I find so much of the subsequent Christian…navel-gazing…both inexplicable and appalling. "Was Jesus God?" "Was he the Son of God?" "Was he half-human and half-God?" "How much was he human and how much was he God?"

What are you *talking* about? You have a documented record of The Single Greatest Combined Act of Courage and Faith ever enacted by a… "I think all us Church Leaders should get together in Nicaea and vote on this, so we can come up with a definitive answer as to how much he was human and how much he was God."

VOTE on it? VOTE? On it? "Yeah. It's three hundred and twenty-five years later and it's really getting to be a problem. Inquiring minds want to know."

Vote. On it. What a perfectly…*goyish*…thing to do.

Jesus had such absolute and unshakeable faith in what he was *doing*, in what he was *told* to do that he kept moving in a straight line for years *knowing* that he was going to get big spikes driven through his wrists into a big piece of wood and another big spike driven through his ankles into another piece of wood and he was going to get hauled aloft with only the splintered remains of his wrists and the splintered remains of his ankles to support his *entire weight* until he *died from the sheer, physically crushing burden of*...

"Right now it looks as if 'Triune God' is going to win out. We're just putting the finishing touches on the winning declaration."

Courage. And Faith. That's it, to me. The rest of what has been attached to it over the last two millennia…as you can see…makes it very difficult for me to contemplate The Courage and The Faith without making jokes about the (to me? frankly? *Appalling*) sideshow which has attached itself to Them.

The Koran assures us that Jesus did not die on the cross. A substitute sacrifice died on the cross—metaphorically like the ram with its horns caught in a thicket which was given to Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son, Isaac (which event, the Koran also assures us, happened with *Ishmael*, Abraham's son by his wife's Egyptian slave, Hagar, and not Isaac, his second son, whose mother was Sarah. The not-unconvincing Islamic case? That even in Genesis, Abraham is instructed to sacrifice "thine *onely* sonne". Given that *only* Ishmael could ever be accurately described as Abraham's "only son"—and indisputably was so until he was fourteen—and that Isaac could only realistically be described as Abraham's *second* son or *one* of his *two* sons…as I say, the case is not unconvincing). The Koran also assures us (repeatedly) that the resolution of these disputes between the Torah, the Gospels (The Evangel as it is called in the Koran) and the Koran will be made plain in the next world.

On the offhand chance they let me in, I'm bringing a notebook full of questions with me.

Not being a Jew (for more on this see my essay, "Jew", in *Cerebus* 269) and not looking remotely Jewish (I'm about as goy-looking as you can get without wearing a Wonder Bread t-shirt), I couldn't picture myself going into a synagogue to pray once it became obvious to me that I would not be going back to the *Anglican* Church. I have my own prayer that I wrote (running time: 10 mins.). I always pictured the rabbi—or whoever would be in there—looking over at the goy (who wouldn't look out of place in a Wonder Bread t-shirt) on his knees praying and that (whoever they were) they couldn't help but think that I'm *probably* praying for the souls of all these Christ Killers: that God should please send a big bolt of lightning that would cause them all to die on the spot and go straight to hell, thus making the world safe for all us good and decent devourers of Baby Jesus Bits, Amen. And, really, who could blame them for thinking that? It's not as if I would be the first, by any stretch of the imagination. And wouldn't they have a *right* to be suspicious? I mean, I do mention Jesus and Muhammad in my prayer, you know, favourably. *Very* favourably.

[I thought of writing out my prayer when I was going to the Anglican Church and saying to the senior priest, sort of, "Say, is it okay by you if I pray this prayer in here?" But then I thought, what business is it of *his*? This

is between me and God. And then I thought, well, yeah, but this guy was obviously tight with the whole Anglican thing when I was still getting *my* theology out of Foolbert Sturgeon's *New Adventures of Jesus* and *Jesus Joins the Armed Services* comic books. And it *is* an Anglican Church. Paid for by Anglican worshippers with a handy book of Anglican rules and regulations right there in every pew. And I did mention the Koran to him in one of those "Thanks for coming out" *en passé* deals after one service and he definitely got that gastric upset look on his face that Margaret Thatcher perfected back in the 1980s. What if he has to send my prayer to "head office" for approval and it comes back full of deletions? What if he says, "What's wrong with the *lord's* Prayer?" I mean *there's* a can of worms. "I'm sorry, father, I just can't ask God to 'lead us not into temptation'. What sort of an awful thing is that to say to God? When has God *ever* led *anyone* into temptation? Does that *sound* to you like something God would do?" And then I figured we'd get into a big ruckus over the Synoptic Gospels and…well…I just prayed my prayer. But, as casual as I tried to be about it, there was a definite illicit quality to thanking God for His Glorious Koran while kneeling in an Anglican Church. So I thought the same thing about the synagogue. Excuse me, rabbi? Is it okay by you if I pray this prayer in here?

It starts off good: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (the goy names for the Books of Moses) followed by Moses, Peace Be Upon Him (so maybe the rabbi doesn't get out much and he wouldn't recognize the "Peace be upon him" as being Islamic, nu?)…all the way down to Malachi (I won't bore you with the whole list of The Books of the Prophets, I'm sure you know them as well as I do). I pictured the rabbi pointing to Malachi. "Tell you what, Wonder Bread, howzabout you call it a day when you get this far and then beat it the hell out of here?"

Worst-case scenario?

Nono. The *worst*-case scenario would be finding myself in a synagogue that turns out to be one of those new, improved, *modern* synagogues (Pardon me, rabbi, is this synagogue Orthodox or Deformed?). Like the Reverend Dupas' First Existential Church in Jules Feiffer's play *Little Murders*—Donald Sutherland played Dupas in the 1971 movie version (looking and sounding *eerily* like Alan Moore)—"Christ died for our sins. Dare we make his martyrdom meaningless by not committing them?" That line didn't make it into the movie version, but that's definitely the kind of squishy "it's all good" secular humanistic moral relativism that sent me to the traditional Anglican Church in the first place, instead of the Peter, Paul and Mary Folk Faith environs I could have chosen instead ("Of course! Pray whatever you want! Pray to Zeus, pray to Palas Athena, pray to Princess Diana, pray to Elton John! We aren't judgemental at *all* in our synagogue!")

In a mosque, of course, just praying *verbally* on my knees in a fixed position would stick out like a sore thumb. I have seen the sequence of body postures and gestures enacted hundreds of times on television. They used to demonstrate the movements on *Reflections on Islam* (the only thing I genuinely miss about not having television anymore: *Reflections on Islam* at 11:00 a.m. and *Passages*—except when they would have a chick-and-a-rabbi instead of two rabbis—at 10 p.m. every Sunday) at least once a year. At *least*. That part never stuck with me (although I remember hearing that there's a "prophetic tradition" that the body postures imitate the Arabic letters which spell Adam's name). I prefer to pray out loud, I prefer to pray my own prayer and I prefer being by myself when I do it. Which is definitely frowned upon (and possibly *haram*—forbidden) in Islam, depending on whose prophetic tradition you're listening to. "God wants to see every King and every commoner, with their prayer mats touching, praying in unison, one man's feet at the next man's head."]

[*I've got this two-inch stack of news clippings on Islam I've been pulling out since late September in anticipation of writing this series of essays. So...*

Speaking of prayer mats:.

This is from a dispatch dated 11 November 2001 by Montreal Gazette *reporter, Levon Sevunts, filed from Chaghatay, Afghanistan about his encounter with another couple of reporters, one of whom was Volker Handoik a writer for the German magazine,* Stern:

Commander Muhammad Bashir…immediately ordered three tanks to open fire on the Taliban positions…The tanks fired with a deafening thud, releasing an enormous flash and disappearing in a cloud of smoke and dust. Four armoured carriers started moving up the hill, their tracks screeching on the sand and rock.

Satisfied by the performance of his troops, Bashir pulled out his prayer mat and started his prayers.

Looking at Bashir bending and kneeling on the mat, Volker complained he was suffering from back pain. I offered him some Motrin that I always carry with me in a first-aid kit.

I've managed to lose the rest of the article, but Volker Hanoik died about twenty minutes later. Shot or blown up—I forget which. He looks at Bashir praying which reminds him...his back hurts. And he bums a pill off somebody. Twenty minutes later he's dead.

I could write ten pages about why I find that story inescapably—and spiritually—poignant and never get within a country mile of an adequate explanation.]

Having read the Torah, the Gospels and the Koran before I started going to the Anglican Church—and being a devoted viewer of *Reflections on Islam*—I was aware of the five "pillars" of Islam. One of those "pillars" became another source of friction in my church-going. My motivation in going to church was to receive what I hoped would be insights into the Gospels…

(Particularly as regards their translation from Aramaic and Ancient Greek into English, a problem comparable to what I was finding with the translation of the Torah from Hebrew into English. English is a pretty versatile language but its limitations become quite apparent quite quickly in studying the Torah and the Gospels. As an example, the translation of Simeon and Levi's transgression in Iacob's deathbed address to his sons (Genesis 49) is that they "digged down a wall". The alternative translation in the margin is that they "houghed oxen." I had to go to the Big Dictionary at the Library to find out that "houghed" is an antiquated English term meaning "hamstrung". Whatever the phrase was—and *is*—in Hebrew, English wasn't up to the task of finding even a close approximation of it. The senior priest was familiar with Aramaic, Ancient Greek and Hebrew and would, very, very occasionally, digress into a discussion of a specific term or usage of a term.

Very occasionally.)

…but, for the most part, the two-hour service was taken up with ritual, organ-playing, singing and homey little sermons which (in my view) twisted the point of every one of Jesus' parables and every Gospel episode into a valuable lesson about Mum, Dad and the Kids which, in good politically-correct fashion, was always skewed to flatter Mum at the expense of Dad and was, thus, appreciably no different, to me (in terms of spiritual content) than what I was able to extract from television commercials. Or the sermons would be about the necessity to be generous and kind and assist in a variety of church-sponsored social programs. It seemed to me that Islam, with the *zakat,* the "stated alms" I've discussed elsewhere, the right of the community to 2.5 percent of each person's accumulated wealth—had it "all over" on Christianity in that regard. Muslims are exhorted to ask each other, "Did *you* pay the *zakat?"* and, in answer, "Did *you?"* Very matter-of-fact. Very central to the faith. One of the five pillars. You can't be a good Muslim unless you pay the *zakat.* You have to "purify your wealth" by donating 2.5 percent of your total wealth to feeding the poor in your community. If you don't do so, your wealth is impure and you have no cause for complaint if it evaporates or gets you into some serious trouble. "You didn't purify your wealth this year? What's the Arabic word for 'putz'?". There is, therefore, no overwhelming need (I would guess) to discuss the *zakat* at any length during Friday prayer services in the Mosques. Anymore than it is necessary to deliver a sermon in a synagogue or a Church that starts, "'Thou shalt not kill.' Isn't that the truth? Let's all make an extra special effort not to kill anyone on our way home today." In Islam, the centrality to the faith of the mandate *incumbent upon each individual* to feed the poor—occupying as it does the same centrality to the faith that the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill" occupies in Judaism and Christianity—thereby doesn't interfere with or supersede the equally pressing need for prayer—*salat,* another of the five pillars—the way that discussing caring for the poor *does* have a tendency to do in Judaism and Christianity so that it is easy for a given church or synagogue to erode from the exalted state of *Beth-El* (God's House) into little more than another largely secular, largely humanist social service agency (this is particularly true, I believe, as women are allowed to play a greater role in the churches: the Triune "God" of women being more Darwin, Marx and Freud than Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Once you are a literal Muslim—"one who submits to the Will of God" is the literal translation of both "Islam" and "Muslim"—by definition, the poor and disadvantaged are never far from your thoughts. "Lend to God a goodly loan," the Koran exhorts repeatedly, meaning, of course, that it is always advisable and praise-worthy to exceed the minimum of the *zakat* to find favour in the sight of God. Once you actually see the effect firsthand of "Lending to God a goodly loan" it's very easy to get carried away. Small wonder that The Koran sura, "The Night Journey" (17:31), cautions: "Let not thy hand be tied up to thy neck; nor yet open it with all openness, lest thou sit thee down in rebuke, in beggary." There's a wonderful traditional story of Abu Bakr (later, the first Caliph of Islam after the death of the Prophet) giving *all* of his money away to the poor. And Muhammad, a little aghast, asking him, "Didn't you keep *anything* for yourself?" To which Abu Bakr, reportedly, replied, "I have given my money to the poor and kept the Word of God for myself." At this point Muhammad turned to Omar (later, the *second* Caliph of Islam) and said, "What about you?" And Omar replied, "I have given half of my wealth to the poor, and I owe God the other half." "No one ever went bankrupt paying the *zakat,"* is another prophetic saying. "God will not wrong you so much as the husk of a date stone." A pretty precise calibration of reward.

Uncertain as I was (and am) that synagogue, church or mosque attendance is a central—or even tangential—

necessity in serving God, having chosen to observe a *shabbath,* a day of rest and prayer (at first, I alternated between a Jewish *shabbath,* Saturday, and a Christian Sabbath, Sunday, which meant I was working five days one week, followed by a day of rest, and seven days the following week, followed by a day of rest. I ultimately settled on Sunday—literally from midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday—although I keep thinking I should probably switch to the Jewish observance, "between the two evenings": sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), continuing to pray twice daily, paying the *zakat,* by the fall of 1999 I had a sense of something missing. Whatever I might've thought, ultimately, of the Anglican Church, the decision not to attend church regularly had left a hole in my life of which I was very much aware. At some point in late 1999 I read some reference to the fact that Ramadan was beginning December 9th. "Fasting in the sacred month" is, of course, another of the five pillars of Islam. I was only vaguely aware of the rules which governed fasting. Early on I had set myself the task of seeing how late on my Sabbath I could leave breakfast—how late before I allowed myself to eat anything. I could usually make it until about four or five in the afternoon but, ultimately, I found that my hunger and thirst were so overwhelming by then that I was scarcely able to perceive the scriptures and commentaries that I was reading—which seemed more than a little spiritually counter-productive. Also, it appealed to the "sports guy" side of me a little too much. Hah! I broke my last week's record by *forty-eight minutes*. Not exactly the sort of spiritual nourishment one associates with ritual fasting. George Petrou (hi, George!) told me about his mother fasting in the Greek Orthodox Church, where she only allowed herself fruit juices or water during the day for…Lent?…I think it was Lent. *Reflections on Islam* did a piece on Ramadan fasting around that time: no food or drink from sunrise to sunset. And, of course, the five daily prayers. The five daily prayers I had a lot of trouble picturing, particularly coupled with the ritual ablutions—after changing into clean, light-coloured clothing, washing the face from the crown of the head to the chin, then washing the right hand up to the elbow, the left hand up to the elbow, washing out the inside of the ears, rinsing out the mouth, inhaling water into both nostrils (you *can't* be serious), washing the right foot to the ankle, washing the left foot to the ankle, wetting the scalp. Using water or *clean sand.* Water, thank God, I had. Then the prayers. Five times a day.

I remembered the Anglican service which is a little tough on rookies. The Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal, the New Improved Book of Common Prayer (what *is* it with Christians and this new, improved kick? Did Madison Avenue really look that sensible to church authorities back in the days of the Second Vatican Council? Or did they just envy Madison Avenue's sheep-herding abilities?). For two hours, I was always at least thirty seconds behind everyone else in finding the right page. *This* bit is on page 59 of the New, Improved Book of Common Prayer *not* page 59 of the Old, *Not* Improved Book of Common Prayer. It's *Hymn* number 203 but it's on *page* 188. *Page* 203 has *hymn* number 217 which doesn't sound *remotely* like this one. What are the words? Can I allow myself to sing these words? Scan the words. "Listen, all of you. Get back. I have a crucifix and some holy water and I'm not afraid to use them." The Nicene Creed. Always scanning ahead a couple of lines: I allow myself to recite this next part. The two lines after that I won't allow myself to say. ("I'm serious. This is actual holy water. Get back."). It wasn't easy. If most of the rituals and recitations and hymns didn't seem to have even the remotest bit of relevance to the books of scripture that I was reading and re-reading at home, there was a certain satisfaction in making the effort, getting the hang of it, and most especially (*hopefully*) pleasing God in the process—although I found it difficult to get a reading on the reactions of The Primarily Judaic God that I pictured—and picture—in my head. I was never quite sure if He was saying, "I know. Do you believe this? And they really think this is a way to worship Me" or "The important motivation is deeper than the skewed content. You can't perceive your own motivations *at that depth* as God can. You have to stick with it" or "It's just something I thought you should see. Not, you know, every Sunday for six months. F'Cryin' out loud, did you read the words to that last hymn? Go home! Read some Scripture!"

I wasn't sure if Ramadan made the "Anglican Two-Step" (sit, stand, recite, kneel, sit, listen, stand, sit, stand, sing, sit, kneel, stand, listen) look easy or the other way around. I became evasive. "Aren't there, like, *specific* prayer times in Islam? I won't know what the *specific* prayer times *are.* I'm pretty sure you can't just do five prayers in a row when you get up in the morning and call it a day, prayer-wise (and I only had to do the ritual ablutions once! Nyuck nyuck nyuck). If I'm just *arbitrarily picking* prayer times, aren't I *basically* transgressing in the same way? Isn't the *ethical difference* just a matter of *degree*? What if the *specific times* are *central* to the *efficacy* of the prayer? Is it *not inconceivable*…is it *not*, in *fact*, a *probability* or, in *further* fact, a *likelihood* that *arbitrary prayer times* could represent a…an *insult to God*, in that case? *Heaven forfend that I should insult God*! (I can really get to "chewing the scenery", bringing to my on-going interior monologue-to-God just this kind of histrionic Talmudic scholar quality when I want to let myself off the hook about something. The sheer effort that's required when I know that's what I'm doing, when *God* knows that's what I'm doing, and when I'm not fooling *either* of us can be exhausting). So I decided to leave it up to God. If God would send me a sign that I

should fast in Ramadan, then I would fast in Ramadan. Asking a sign from God verges, I'm pretty sure, on blasphemy so I really don't recommend it as, you know, a *lifestyle*. If you *do* ask, however, it seems to me that it's important to *pay attention* and—in a case where the sign seems subtle or ambiguous—to err on the side of *believing* in the sign instead of *doubting* the sign.

The next day, an envelope (from *Reflections on Islam)* arrived at my apartment. Inside was a printed form containing the prayer times for Ramadan under the heading "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may fear God." (2:179). Subtle, I grant you, but I decided to give God the benefit of the doubt.

PART II

Lengthy digression before we get back to my first Ramadan fast:

Of course, the reason that I got the prayer times for Ramadan from *Reflections on Islam* is because I contribute to them financially (I also receive an "Eid Mubarak" card from them on the occasion of Eid-al-Fitr—marking the end of the Ramadan fast. The cards are, inevitably, addressed to "Dave Sim & family" which amuses me to no end: in Islam, being childless, I would be considered a "man without a tail": which, you know, suits me fine). In the aftermath of 11 September as Canada and most of the world—and all of the *civilized* parts of it—moved with decidedly undemocratic swiftness to clamp down on terrorist fundraising organizations, I patiently waited to find out if *Reflections on Islam* was a cover organization for Hamas, Hezbolleh, Islamic Jihad, Egyptian Jihad, al-Qaeda or any of the other cornucopia of terrorist organizations within the Nation of Islam. I assumed that if that was the case, I would probably merit a phone call from someone at the RCMP, CSIS or some other Canadian security agency. A "mind if we take a look around?" visit, however unlikely (unless they just wanted to be able to tell the guys back at the office what a Muslim named "Dave" looks like)—to a democratic purist like myself—might easily cross the line from a *quasi*-legal to a genuinely *il*legal infringement of my civil rights. Still, in my own mind, there was no question that I would undergo whatever came my way without a word of complaint, with full cooperation and with no idea of seeking redress in the aftermath.

Why is that, you ask?

To answer that makes this lengthy digression a good deal lengthier:

It is probably best to begin with Linda Frum's article (*National Post,* 20 October 01) on Steven Emerson who is, according to the article, "widely recognized as America's foremost independent investigative expert on Islamic terrorism. According to the former head of FBI investigations and counter-terrorism, Oliver Revell, he is better informed about the activities of terrorists in America than the FBI itself'. It goes on to say that although Emerson was "once shunned by mainstream U.S. media as an extremist and a racist, he is now in constant demand by major U.S. news outlets." (thus ever with the laughably shifting sands of what passes for integrity at the major U.S. news outlets, eh?) "His organization, The Investigative Project, is a non-profit outfit that tracks the activities, statements and fund-raising of Islamic terrorist groups operating in the U.S., as well as the mainstream, tax-exempt, charitable organizations which serve as their fronts.

"'What do they want?' asks Emerson. 'It runs in varying degrees. One, they want political influence. Two, they want to see the U.S. become a Muslim country. ...'"

Undoubtedly, this raises an eyebrow or two among my readership where it doesn't provoke outright hilarity, but Mr. Emerson is quite correct, as we'll see in the later parts of these essays.

"'...three, they want the U.S. to be sensitive to the legitimate interests of Muslims around the world, which they define as support for the Jihad in Palestine, the Jihad in Chechnya, the Jihad in the Philippines, the Jihad in Saudi Arabia.'

"Mr. Emerson has devoted the last seven years of his life to recording what U.S. Islamic leaders say among themselves. For example, Muzammil Siddiqui, the former president of Islamic Society of North America and Imam of the Islamic Society of Orange County in California, was invited to the Oval Office by George W. Bush on Sept. 26 so that the President could thank him for his participation in the national day of mourning and remembrance. Siddiqui told the President: 'The Muslim community has unanimously condemned and deplored the crime committed on Sept. 11, 2001. It was a most horrible crime against our nation and against humanity.'"

Of course, the Imam is referring to the nation of *Islam* in his quote and the widely-held belief among Muslims that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were executed by Israel's Mossad intelligence agency—that is, that the "crime" of 11 September was the "framing" of the Nation of Islam for the terrorist attacks. The quote just doesn't ring true otherwise: no Muslim Imam would refer to the United States as "our nation". Any such reference by a Muslim cleric to *any* nation *other* than Islam would be considered heretical if not completely and unforgivably blasphemous by the Muslim leadership. By contrast, another quote of Siddiqui's does ring true: from his address at the 2000 Jerusalem Day rally in Washington:

"We want to awaken the conscience of America, because—if you remain on the side of injustice—the wrath of God will come. Please, all Americans, do remember that: that Allah is watching everyone. If you continue doing injustice, and tolerating injustice, the wrath of God will come."

[The use of the name "Allah" when the speaker or writer is addressing me in English really grates on my nerves in a serious way. I don't worship "Allah" for the same reason that I don't worship "Dieu" or "Mungu". Each language has an equivalent term for "god". Capitalize it and away you go. That's His Name, but only if you are speaking that language. If you're speaking Arabic, His Name is Allah. If you're speaking French, His Name is Dieu, if you're speaking Swahili, His Name is Mungu, if you're speaking English, His Name is God.]

Steve Emerson on Siddiqui: "Siddiqui is the leader of one of the largest Islamic groups in the United States. He talks a nice game. Everyone says he's a nice guy. But the level of naïveté and denial [among Americans] is nothing short of astonishing. It's very difficult to get a sense of the dimension of what we're up against because of the level of deception. There isn't a moderate Islamic leadership. There isn't. And someone has got to say it. We deny it at our peril."

Exactly. There. Is. *No*. Moderate. Islamic. Leadership.

Steve Emerson again: "There was a major meeting the other day between twenty *Democratic* [italics mine] Senators and representatives of militant Islamic groups. It was just obscene. The Islamic leaders now come crying under victimhood status and as being the subject of hate crimes. But no one has demanded that the price of coming to the table is that they thoroughly repudiate Islamic terrorism."

This is an ongoing problem in the Western democracies, in my view. The Irish Republican Army represents a comparable level of ridiculousness when it comes to "negotiations". It seems fundamental to me that getting the IRA or Islam to *repudiate* violence should only be considered the first baby step in the right direction *towards* the negotiating table. Actual *access* to the negotiating table should hinge on purging their own ranks of those who refuse to repudiate violence and those who have committed acts of violence—or it needs to be done on their behalf with the full acquiescence of the leadership. That is, the IRA leadership should give Her Majesty's Special Forces a list of names and addresses and get out of the way. At the *conclusion* of which those who have repudiated violence—and who have not themselves ordered or committed violence—can sit down and *begin* to negotiate.

George Jonas had a column around this time that seems, to me, distinctly relevant to the situation, entitled "A lesson from the professor and the station master":

> *The story of the Turkish station master was told to me by the Hungarian icon, the poet George Faludy, now in his 90s. He heard it from Rustem Vambery, the noted lawyer and diplomat when they were both in New York at the end of the Second World War. The incident itself happened a long time ago, and it involved Vambery's father, Arminius, the 19th-century Orientalist. Professor Arminius Vambery was a severely crippled man who had to use crutches. This didn't stop him from becoming an explorer of note, and the author of several important books on Central Asia. There were no private jets in those days, but VIPs often travelled by private railway carriage. Passing through Turkey as the Sultan's guest one year, the professor had his own carriage attached to the train. After the engine stopped at a small station in Anatolia, on the Asian side of the Marmaran Sea, a Turkish station master entered the carriage. He sized up Vambery with a sly glance, bowed perfunctorily, then informed the professor that, regrettably, his carriage needed to be uncoupled from the train.*
>
> *Vambery was travelling with a friend. They looked at each other. "Why?" Vambery asked.*
>
> *"Regulations,* effendi,*" the station master replied with a smirk. "We need to leave your carriage behind on the siding. For a slight consideration, though, an exception can be made."*
>
> *With that, he calmly held out his hand for* baksheesh [a bribe].
>
> *The station master was a huge brute, as it happened. His immense palm made a good target, so Vambery immediately whacked it with his crutch. Then he struggled to his feet, striking the Turk repeatedly with all his might.*
>
> *The station master—who could have snapped the professor in half—didn't even try to ward off the blows. "*Effendi, *I didn't know, forgive me, I didn't realize," he muttered, bowing deeply and backing off. "In your case, of course, regulations don't apply."*
>
> *"Didn't you see the size of that fellow?" Vambery's friend asked, shaken, after the genuflecting giant had backed out of the car. "Weren't you afraid to hit him?"*
>
> *"Of course," replied Vambery, "but this is the Orient. I would have been far* more *afraid* not *to hit him."*

Mr. Jonas' conclusion drawn from the anecdote seemed particularly pertinent last fall and just as pertinent now even though his more specific point—at the time—was addressed to the ridiculous idea (then circulating) that America might consider suspending its air attacks against the Taliban in the sacred month of Ramadan:

Vambery's assessment of what is to be feared more, firmness or appeasement, holds true in many parts of the world, not just the Orient. Except in the East it's more than a rule of thumb. It's one of the fundamentals which Westerners—especially Americans—have trouble appreciating...What Americans find hard to understand is that gestures of magnanimity are not seen as such in Eastern cultures. In fact, they have the opposite effect...

...There's a bewildered question Americans, and Westerners in general, keep asking after 9-11: "Why do they hate us so?" The question also has an unasked corollary: "Why don't they respect us more?'

The answer may be that we haven't yet learned when to whack the station master and when to offer him baksheesh.

It's a little more complicated than that when it comes to the relationship between the United States and Islam. Being a devoted fan of both entities, maybe I can offer a little insight: The disaster of 11 September can be attributed, I think, in no small part to Osama bin Laden's previous successes against the United States—or those actions which could be construed as successes by an Islamic terrorist. Whether bin Laden himself or some other Muslim terrorist organization was behind the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in 1983, the hotel bombing in Aden in 1992 (where U.S. military personnel were stationed), Mogadishu in 1993, the Khobar Towers bombing in Dhahran in June, 1996 (where nineteen American soldiers died and five hundred others—including native Saudis—were injured), the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 and the attack on the USS Cole off Yemen in October of 2000—in each case, the setback was followed by a U.S. withdrawal of its forces. From this side of the big pond, this is easy to understand as an implication of the Vietnam Syndrome: the assumption that the American people have a very low tolerance for American military casualties unless a good reason for them can be explained—to their satisfaction—between commercial breaks on the CBS, NBC, ABC and Fox Evening Newscasts. That's a bit glib, I admit, but only a *bit.* Nor am I casting aspersions. The United States of America is the first great democracy in human history, the country that wrote—and continues to write—the book on what democracy *is*. And not just *theoretical democracy* (the Greeks were great at theory) but *practical application.* When the final judgement in all matters of government policy resides with "We the People" it is entirely within the rights of "We the People" to demand that any military adventure contemplated by its elected representatives and/or the head of its Executive Branch be explained in two-and-a-half minutes before *The Simpsons* comes on. I might think it an inadvisable approach to governing The Great Republic and certainly there is no shortage of elected representatives and/or former Presidents who have failed to pass the two-and-a-half minute-network-news test with any number of policies (when Lyndon Johnson lost the support of Walter Cronkite, he knew he had lost the support of the American people) and who *wished* that there was some *other* way to reach the American people than through two-and-a-half minute segments on network television news. Some of those policies may even (in a hypothetical nation arranged along different lines of priority) have proved to be darned good ideas. Ronald Reagan's decision to send a contingent of Marines into Beirut in 1983 and to house them onshore, rather than offshore, may have been one of those darned good ideas. However, once two hundred or so of those marines died in an Islamic terrorist truck-bomb attack, the idea had had its chance and—given President Reagan's sound political instincts—it wasn't possible for him to withdraw the remaining troops fast enough. A good example of American democracy in action. But, it was arguably (bearing in mind George Jonas' station master anecdote), the first bad United-States-to-Nation-of-Islam signal. A bad signal, but inescapable, given the nature of the world's Vanguard Democracy. Whatever damage the bombing of the Marine barracks did to President Reagan's Gallup Poll numbers, those numbers would not have been assisted by departing Beirut with a Scorched Earth policy. However, given the nature of Islam, the nature of the Middle East, the nature of (may God have mercy on us all) Beirut, Scorched Earth or some variation was the only sensible act before departing. *Someone* had to pay. In fact, at least *two hundred* someone's had to pay if American prestige was to be maintained in the area. Given the bad signal that immediate withdrawal would, inevitably, send to all parts of the Islamic world, several *thousand* someone's would probably have been a more strategically effective number (ten of *you* is worth *one* of *us*). But, again, from this side of the pond, the very idea is ridiculous. President Reagan would've been impeached. At the very least, his credibility would've suffered a disastrous blow if he had just arbitrarily picked an Islamic sector in Beirut and bombed the hell out of it, killing several thousand Muslims. I may be wrong, but I think we would be a lot closer to peace in the Middle East over the last decade or so if he *had.* But, clearly, 1983 was a different time period and such a level of retaliation would never have "passed muster" with President Reagan's boss: the American people. The result, however, was to plant the seed of perception within the Nation of Islam that America was weak, that the corruption of its myriad vices had left it hollow and with no stomach or heart for conflict. Each successive withdrawal of U.S. military forces only

reinforced the perception. No matter how formidable the United States may *appear* (went Islamic reasoning), one good truck bomb explosion and they turn tail and run away. In defence of the "is *The Simpsons* on yet?" American public, I think that their acceptance of these atrocities—while misconstrued by the Nation of Islam as weakness—in actual fact, gave proof of a very broad-minded, cosmopolitan and philosophical magnanimity. A democracy—a *good* democracy—is always going to have a love-hate relationship with its military, tending toward the latter more often than the former. At the time of the attack on the USS Cole, you wouldn't have had to look far to find an American whose view of the attack was "well, it serves us right for all of our meddling in foreign countries." In most of New York City, in the Democrat half of Washington, in Hollywood, in the colleges and universities you couldn't, I would maintain, swing a dead cat at the time of the attack on the USS Cole without hitting an American whose viewpoint tended in that direction. Not too long ago, any citizen expressing aloud just such an opinion in any of the countries which make up the civilized world would have, more likely as not, found themselves prosecuted on a charge of treason. But seeing near-treason—hell, *actual* treason—as just another form of free speech, is one of the more dazzling examples of *purist democracy* that has made the United States "the shining city on the hill", a phrase Ronald Reagan was incapable of using to describe his native land without having his eyes mist over (and a feat—I freely confess—I am unable to manage, myself, as I type the words). A democracy which is capable of treating treasonous remarks as free speech is—say what you will—a pretty broad-minded democracy. However *being* just such a democracy is a two-edged sword: in answer to the attack on the USS Cole, all the U.S. government—all President Clinton—could do to reflect the will of "We the People" was to fire a few cruise missiles in the direction of the caves of Tora Bora and wait for *The Simpsons* to come on. There was no real mandate from "We the People" beyond that. Had he attempted any *larger* military response he would've been committing political suicide—particularly among his own core constituency (see above). Bearing the station master model in mind, this made an escalation on the part of Islamic terrorists inevitable. If all you get for disabling the USS Cole is a cruise missile "slap on the wrist," the only question was one of scale. How much *bigger* an atrocity could the Islamic terrorists imagine than the USS Cole attack?

Pretty big as it turns out.

[Arguably, the bombing of the Khobar Towers military housing project in Saudi Arabia was the larger—but less public—of the two catastrophes and, consequently, the one which more accurately prefigured the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The sheer devastation which resulted from the truck bomb attack was the largest explosion ever investigated by the FBI, dwarfing the Oklahoma City bombing by a substantial margin. However, the love-hate relationship between the military and the American public cuts both ways—or it did, prior to 11 September—and the size of the Khobar Towers devastation was largely kept secret by the military—with the cooperation of the House of Saud—in a way that the Navy couldn't have managed with the USS Cole, since the Cole and the effects of that attack were basically a free-floating photo op in international waters.]

As Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post Writers Group reported in his column of 18 January 2002: as early as 1996 (the year of the Khobar Towers attack) Osama bin Laden, in his "Declaration of War Against the Americans" was gloating, "Your most disgraceful case was in Somalia…when tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu, you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you." Not one to mince words, bin Laden added (according to Krauthammer) "You have been disgraced by Allah and you withdrew. The extent of your impotence and weaknesses became very clear." What is *clearer* is the misunderstanding on bin Laden's part of the nature of democracy, of civilian control of the military and of the chain of command in the United States which originates in "We the People". The collective will which is enacted through the President by the implementing of those actions which, in an emergency, he infers to *be* the will of "We the People": actions which are then overruled, modified, curtailed or rubber-stamped by the Congress as the—no longer inferred, but now implied—will of "We the People" becomes clearer in the short- and long-term aftermath of any emergency. Rubber-stamped by the Congress in the case of FDR's reaction to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour as *conforming* to the will of "We the People" and severely curtailed in the case of the escalation and widening of the conflict in Vietnam by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon as *violating* the will of "We the People". In 1993 it didn't require a rocket scientist to judge that "We the People" would take a dim view of a larger military presence in Somalia when, as Krauthammer so aptly puts it, "you go into a country of total strategic irrelevance for solely humanitarian reasons, then find yourself being fired upon by thugs and ingrates" as happened in Mogadishu. His conclusion, I believe, reflects with complete accuracy what the will of "We the People" was, would be and will be under those sorts of circumstances: "your tolerance for casualties is—and should be—virtually zero. You pick up and get out. This is not cowardice; this is common sense."

Osama bin Laden, on an on-going and rapidly escalating basis, misconstrued that level of common sense and accountability to "We the People" to his own—presumably monumental and permanent—detriment (wherever he

might be skulking now). A further digression:

His whereabouts, as well as the whereabouts of Taliban leader Mohammed Omar, in my view, shouldn't be of the paramount concern to the American people and their leadership that it appears to be. Although, again, from this side of the pond such paramount concern is certainly understandable. Although my knowledge of Tribal ways is certainly less extensive than my knowledge of Muslim ways—the latter interests me profoundly, the former not at all—what indirect awareness of Tribalism I've been able to pick up from my readings of the biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, my best guess is that most of the Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership has been ransomed and that these were the actual negotiations which were taking place at Kandahar and at Tora Bora—when the Taliban and al-Qaeda membership were (theoretically) negotiating terms of surrender—after which everyone just seemed to "disappear" into thin air. The ransoming of captives has a long history in Islam and among the pagan tribal Arabs which were their predecessors and the Afghan Tribes which they closely resemble, structurally. Essentially, ransoming guarantees that a warrior of noble birth and from a good family isn't going to languish in prison or face execution in the aftermath of a battle or war. Once it is clear, as was the case in Afghanistan, that one side has lost, the two sides enter into negotiations as to how much the losing side is going to pay the winning side to recover the captives of noble birth and good family. A price is arrived at, the families in question are notified, the money changes hands and the ransomed captives are returned to their homelands and their families. I suspect that the Taliban and al-Qaeda membership which were turned over to the American authorities were those Muslims of poorer birth and without monied families able or willing to ransom them. This will be a bitter pill for most Americans to swallow, but it really shouldn't be. The disgrace of their humiliating defeat in Afghanistan will follow the ransomed former captives back to Chechnya, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and (I suspect) primarily Pakistan or wherever else they came from and I don't think it a stretch of the imagination to say that many of them, as the years go by, will envy as the more fortunate their Muslim brothers interned at Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay where at least (as they will see it) every Muslim gets to live in the same level of humiliation and disgrace with nothing to compare it to and no *umma*—Muslim community—to be largely ostracized from and disgraced within: unlike those ransomed "veterans" of the Afghanistan debacle who—repatriated to Iraq or Iran, say—will be viewed, universally and ill-disguisedly, as something lower and more pathetic than a whipped dog by those around them.

Hyperbole?

Hardly. In both the Torah and the Koran, the sure sign of God's favour is the disproportionate military victory. Leviticus 26:8: "And five of you shal chase a hundred and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword" is directly paralleled by the sura (chapter) "The Spoils" 8:65-67: "O Prophet! God, and such of the faithful as follow thee, will be all sufficient for thee. O Prophet! Stir up the faithful to the fight. Twenty of you who stand firm shall vanquish two hundred: and if there be a hundred of you they shall vanquish a thousand of the infidels, for they are a people devoid of understanding. Now hath God made your work easy, for He knoweth how weak ye are. If there be a hundred of you who endure resolutely, they shall vanquish two hundred; and if there be a thousand of you, they shall vanquish two thousand by God's permission; for God is with those who are resolute to endure."

Of course the "infidels" referred to in "The Spoils" are the pagan Arabs of Mecca who opposed Muhammad and the whole *notion* of there being Only One God—something I'll be getting to next issue—but I think it is far more worthwhile for the American people to recognize that, from a Muslim standpoint, it will soon be inescapable (if it isn't already) that God...*vehemently*...took the *American* side in the conflict in Afghanistan...

[The U.S. Special Forces unit, Tiger 03, as an example—consisting of *ten* Marines—is credited with the death of *1,500* Taliban and al-Qaeda by calling in pinpoint-accurate-air-strikes on a series of cave complexes. That *one* anecdotal fact, I can guarantee you, is of *infinitely* greater moment, significance and concern to Terrorist Islam than whether or not Osama bin Laden—glassy-eyed, trembling and muttering into his own daisy-cutter-punctured-eardrums—is "at large" in some Pakistani backwater of a village...or whether he *ever* ends up in the custody of the U.S. government. Osama bin Laden is the whipped dog *di tutti* whipped dogs of the Militant Muslim world at this point. It would, I think, only diminish the lustre of the U.S. victory in Islamic eyes for the U.S. to continue to express any...undue...interest in him.]

...as opposed to the Muslim expulsion of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989, after the Soviets had suffered 17,000 casualties on the ground. In *that* instance, the purest of the Muslim pure (as the Taliban and their Muslim allies had come to see themselves) could justifiably say that God was with *them* in their efforts and that the small God-fearing nation had—like a textbook reading of "The Spoils"—put their vastly larger opponent to flight. No big

surprise. A God-fearing country will always put a godless country to flight when push comes to shove. What was of interest among the God-fearing at the start of the American bombing campaign, 7 October 2001 was: which side will God take? Or will God take either side? My own view was that the conflict would be a long one, the air war could be taken only so far and then the ground war would have to begin. The fact that all of the working models for extricating enemy forces from caves entailed *huge* casualties on the part of the attacking force (the vast majority from "friendly fire")...a 10:1 ratio or thereabouts, was what I had read...meant that the conflict would only start to get really interesting, militarily, a few months in. From what I was able to read between the lines of the heavily censored news we were getting at the time, this was not far off the Pentagon's own best assessment and the motivation behind President Bush cautioning the American people *repeatedly and emphatically* that there were going to be a *lot* of casualties. I assumed this would be one of the President's major roles: to *keep* repeating this for the three or four months of the air war so it wouldn't come as a shock to "We the People" when the body bags started coming home in prodigious numbers along about February or March. Slobodan Milosevic had held out against the U.S. aerial bombardment of Kosovo for a little over eighty days, but (went my best thinking) that was in a largely urban environment and in a context where it would be noticeable to the leadership that many of the niceties of their civilization were taking an awful beating. As everyone's quality of life began to deteriorate something had to give and it only seemed sensible to surrender Milosevic to the world community and sue for peace. Afghanistan (I thought) had more in common with Vietnam, insofar as the enemy was effectively indistinguishable from the civilian population (once he put his gun and ammunition down). Also—Vietnam-like—when the enemy is...*literally!*...able to subsist on a bowl of rice and a pot of green tea a day, it becomes exponentially more difficult to punish him in any militarily significant meaning of the term. That is, where there is no appreciable quality of life *beyond* mere *subsistence*, there is no militarily effective way to *erode* the enemy's quality of life as a *strategy*. Couple that with praying five times a day (you may think it irrelevant: I think it central), complete abstinence from alcohol and the fact that for twenty years or more the principle industry in Afghanistan had been the waging of war...well, let's just say that I was not alone in my assessment that this was going to be far from a cakewalk.

And yet, a cakewalk it was. So much so that it took *everyone* by complete surprise, including the American military leadership. The air war was over—not in *eighty* days, as in Kosovo—but in *thirty-five* days. And what was even more unbelievable, when the air war was over, the war *itself* was over for all intents and purposes.

As a Deist, as a monotheist, when something happens that is that...*dramatically!*...inexplicable, when the result is so completely and thoroughly at odds with every *genuinely* expert opinion (that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and with every looney bit of wishful thinking (that of the *New York Times* editorial board) there is, ultimately, only one sensible conclusion to come to:

God.

How much more eloquently could God have expressed His preference for freedom and for democracy over oppression and theocracy? These were the purest of the purest Muslims, the most devout and the most battle-hardened and militarily successful Muslims of modern times living *in* and fighting *for* the purest Muslim state since...well, it would be a good exercise in Muslim scholarship to determine at what previous point in the history of Islam there had existed a more Islamically ascetic, a less Islamically corrupt and a more avowedly devout Muslim nation than Afghanistan under the Taliban. Iran after the Shah was deposed in 1979? Possibly, but it was still largely Westernized, still rotten to various of its cores both from a Muslim *and* Western standpoint. Afghanistan had drawn to itself the purest and most devout Muslims at around the same time but had, in recent years, effectively expunged almost every trace of that Great Satan of Orthodox Islam: Westernization. Television? Banned. Movies? Banned. Music? Banned. Balloons? Banned. Anything which was not Islam, anything which was not widely accepted as having solid roots in the Koran, solid roots in the way of life on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century? Banned.

And it was exactly this form of theocratic rule which—against all accepted odds, against even the most optimistic of expert opinion—suffered the most disproportionate and absolute military defeat in the history of armed conflict. Clearly, to me, God's indisputable preference was for a nation stands for—and which will always stand for—close-to-absolute freedom, freedom to exercise the free will which God has given each of us—even though vast numbers of the people of that nation, millions upon millions *choose not to believe in God.* And to give that nation an overwhelming... *mind-bogglingly overwhelming and dramatically disproportionate!*...victory over those who would *impose* God, impose *belief in* God and impose the *worship of* God on others *against their God-given free will.*

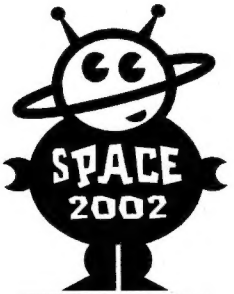
Theocracy?

No!

Freedom?

Yes!

Next: The Long Digression continues...



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